

ETHAN MAO

A Film by Quentin Lee

A Margin Films Production
in association with
Trailing Johnson Productions

2004, 88 mins, 35mm

World Premiere
AFI Fest 2004

Audience Award for Best Feature Film
20th Turin Lesbian & Gay Film Festival

ethanmao.com

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main credits

MARGIN FILMS
Presents

A MARGIN FILMS
Production

in association with
TRAILING JOHNSON PRODUCTIONS

A QUENTIN LEE
Film

ETHAN MAO

THE CAST

Ethan.....	JUN HEE LEE
Abraham.....	RAYMOND MA
Sarah.....	JULIA NICKSON
Josh.....	KEVIN KLEINBERG
Remigio.....	JERRY HERNANDEZ
Noel.....	DAVID TRAN
Mrs. Harvisham.....	MARY GILBERT
Teenage Boy.....	RENE DeLEON
Waitress.....	JANE TAINI
Rich Man.....	ERIK ROBINSON
Unseen Man.....	GREGORY DANIELS
Sheriff Black.....	MICHAEL MEISROW

THE FILMMAKERS

Writer & Director.....	QUENTIN LEE
Produced by.....	STANLEY YUNG QUENTIN LEE
Director of Photography.....	JAMES C. YUAN
Production Designer.....	RODNEY HOM
Film Editor.....	CHRISTINE KIM
Costume Designer.....	STEVEN NORMAN LEE
Associate Producers.....	JULIE ASATO ERNESTO FORONDA JOAN HUANG
Production Manager.....	RANDY KAPLAN
Music by.....	STEVEN PRANOTO
Casting by.....	JOAN HUANG
First Assistant Director.....	JUSTIN RITTER
Second Assistant Director.....	MARY LIZ THOMSON

"Ethan Mao"

A psychological thriller + coming-of-age/family
drama + gay love story + black comedy

A psychological thriller, a coming-of-age drama, a gay love story, and a black comedy, *Ethan Mao* tells the story of an 18-year-old boy reaching the point of no return.

Booted out of his house for being gay, Ethan Mao survives on the street as a hustler. There he meets 19-year-old Remigio, a drug dealer and fellow hustler who takes him in.

After being tipped off by his younger brother that his family is going on a day trip on Thanksgiving Day, Ethan asks Remigio for a ride to his family house to collect his belongings.

On that fateful day, Ethan's family returns early to discover he and Remigio are looting the house. His father is shocked and enraged and forces Ethan into a physical confrontation.

Holding his father at gunpoint, Ethan demands that his manipulative stepmother return his deceased mother's diamond necklace only to find out she is keeping it in a safety deposit box at the bank.

With Remigio by his side, Ethan decides to hold his family hostage until the bank opens the next morning. In the waning desperate hours, Ethan, his family and Remigio are forced to confront their unresolved conflicts and feelings. As the tensions between Ethan and his family escalate, their inner demons and secrets unravel in this suspenseful and touching drama.

notes from the filmmaker

While studying literature in college, I was inspired by Thomas Hardy's tragic character-driven novels such as *Tess of the D'urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*. Hardy's intense character study and his empathy with disillusioned and underprivileged characters have left an indelible impression on me. I was especially fascinated by the ironic innocence of Tess, who was raped in the first 30 pages of the novel but remained "virgin-like" throughout the remainder of the book. I'd like to think *Ethan Mao* is my own dramatic feature update/homage to *Tess of the D'urbervilles*.

Ethan Mao merges several genres. It is a drama about a gay teenager living on the margins of society. It is also a psychological thriller filled with unexpected twists and turns. Finally, it is a (gay) love story about Ethan, who in the beginning of the movie feels he is incapable of loving or finding someone who will love him.

In addition, *Ethan Mao* explores the conflicts and relationships between failed parents and damaged children. It is also a romantic and transgressive teenage love story with a nod to *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

At the heart of it all, it is about a damaged boy's quest to get what he deserves in life and love—regardless of the circumstances or risks.

In making *Ethan Mao*, I was given the fantastic opportunity to work with highly talented veteran actors like Julia Nickson and Raymond Ma, as well as exciting newcomers like Jun Hee Lee and Jerry Hernandez. In finalizing the cast, it was nothing short of a miracle that everyone in the film was my first choice and that they were incredibly attractive and ethnically diverse. Julia Nickson is half English and half Chinese, originally from Singapore. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Raymond Ma is Chinese American. Jun Hee Lee is Korean American. Jerry Hernandez is half Guatemalan American and half Filipino American. Kevin Kleinberg is half Filipino American and half German American. David Tran is Vietnamese American. Truly a multicultural cast.

Coming from an early background of experimental filmmaking where I often mixed film and video, I decided to shoot everything outside the house, such as Ethan's life on the street, on DV with an immediate, frenetic and fragmented style to portray Ethan's emotionally displaced subjectivity. Everything inside the house, which primarily tells Ethan's past suburban life and the hold-up drama, was shot on 35MM with a lot of "master shots" and a touch of De Palma and Ozu to create a cinematic stage between Greek tragedy and modern psychological thriller.

Ethan Mao was everything that I wanted to do—a stylish thriller, an edgy teen drama, and an unapologetic romance. It's De Palma; it's Hitchcock; it's Ozu; it's Truffaut; it's Wong Ka Wai; it's Gus Van Sant. It's a bastard of a film—a celebration of hybridization and bastardization, ironically not unlike myself who was born in Hong Kong (a post-

colonial territory that I had known, since a little kid, would cease to exist by 1997). As an artist, I've been navigating between identities and boundaries—gay / Asian / Chinese / Hong Kong / Canadian / American. In some way, Ethan reflects my sadness, my longing, my hopes and nevertheless my quest for emotional, cultural, and artistic integrity.

The shooting schedule was tight—three six-day weeks. We shot two weeks on 35MM with a cumbersome Arri BL 4 inside the house and one week on 24P Mini-DV with the Panasonic DVX100 outside the house. And one more day of pick-up. All on an extremely limited budget.

One night during our ten weeks of editing, I went out to Tigerheat, an 18+ gay club, with some friends. Sometimes you begin to lose objectivity when you're with a project too long. I needed a break that night. I bumped into a friend, a 19-year-old gay Chinese American boy, whose shy demeanor made me suddenly realize whom I was making this movie for. I remembered what it was like being a teenager, a gay teenager, a gay Asian teenager, and a gay Asian teenager in America. I looked around the club and saw teenagers and young adults who were young, who were beautiful, who were awkward, who were afraid, and who nonetheless tried their best to be who they were in a less than perfect world.

That night, I realized that subconsciously I was making a movie for them. And with some luck, I hope this movie will reach them, empower and entertain them and all of us.

Quentin Lee
Writer/Director

about the filmmakers

Quentin Lee (Producer, Writer, Director)

Premiering at the Toronto International Film Festival in 1997, Quentin Lee's first feature *Shopping for Fangs* opened to critical acclaim during its limited theatrical release in the U.S. Lee wrote, co-directed (with Justin Lin), produced and self-distributed *Shopping for Fangs* through Margin Films. The success of *Fangs* paved the way for Lee's second feature *Drift* and Justin Lin's 2002 Sundance hit *Better Luck Tomorrow*.

Following *Fangs*, Lee returned to a more personal realm; he produced, wrote and directed *Drift*, a drama that became a hit on the gay and lesbian film festival circuit and was sold to Wellspring Media. It was also released theatrically to rave reviews in Los Angeles.

Through Margin Films, a company he founded in 1997, Lee has single-handedly distributed and promoted a slate of American and international independent films in the U.S. The titles included Yonfan's *Bugis Street*, *Bishonen*, the Christopher Doyle shot *4 Faces of Eve*, *Bastards*, *Bao*, *Summerspell*, *Virtue* and more. As a company, Margin Films is committed to producing, distributing-and marketing culturally challenging commercial entertainment that celebrates the diversity and difference of the world.

Ethan Mao is Lee's second solo feature as a writer/director. Born and raised in Hong Kong, Lee is a Canadian citizen and U.S. resident. He holds a B.A. in English from UC Berkeley, an M.A. in English from Yale University, and an M.F.A. in Film Directing from UCLA.

Stanley Yung (Producer)

A San Francisco native, Stanley Yung graduated from UCLA Film School. He went on to attend Roger Corman's "School of Film" where he worked on numerous B-movie classics and made the leap from P.A. to Director in just a year and a half. A writer/director in his own right, Yung directed the feature film *Shadow Dancer*, an installment of the *Black Scorpion* TV series, and the short film *World of Longing*. He has also been a producer for feature films *Shopping for Fangs* and *Catfish in Black Bean Sauce* and is currently developing a number of projects.

James C. Yuan (Director of Photography)

James C. Yuan received his BA in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics from Pomona College in 1997. He is currently completing his MFA in Cinematography at UCLA film school. His first-year film won the UCLA Spotlight Award in 2001, and his work as a Director of Photography has screened in various festivals and galleries. He grew up in Pasadena, CA and currently resides in West Hollywood, CA. After years of shooting film shorts, installation works, music videos, and spec commercials, Yuan is delighted to have shot *Ethan Mao* as his first film feature.

Christine Kim (Editor)

Christine Kim discovered her passion for editing while cutting experimental shorts at Williams College in Massachusetts, where she received a degree in English Literature. Since arriving in Los Angeles, she has edited numerous short films, a feature-length documentary, and an episode of the Sci Fi Network's show *Good vs. Evil*. She has also lent her technical expertise as an assistant editor to films as diverse and challenging as David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* and Michael Bay's *Bad Boys II*. What Kim likes most about editing is collaborating with directors who have bold and articulate visions for their films. She looks forward to working on more films like *Ethan Mao*.

Rodney Hom (Production Designer)

Rodney Hom attended U.C. Berkeley where he received a degree in psychology. Psychic phenomenon led him to Art Center College of Design where he received a bachelor of fine arts. Hom's first film won him the 2000 Student Academy Award and as a playwright he has won many an award as well. Hom earns his keep as an advertising art director *par excellence*.

Steven Norman Lee (Costume Designer)

Steven Norman Lee has worked in both television and theater in Los Angeles. Honored with the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences Internship, he had the opportunity to work in a variety of television productions, including *The Bold and Beautiful*, *Providence* and *Charmed*. Recent television/film productions include: *Carnivale* (HBO) and *Stand up for Justice* (Visual Communications). In theater, he has designed *The Tempest* and *Monster*, staged at the David Henry Hwang Theater. Lee is currently a Guest Professor and Designer at the Claremont Colleges. He earned his BA from the University of California, Irvine and his MFA in costume design at the University of Texas, Austin.

Steven Pranoto (Music Composer)

Steven Pranoto graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles with a Bachelor of Arts in Music Composition and a Bachelor of Science in Cognitive Science. He scored Quentin Lee's features *Drift* and *Shopping for Fangs* in addition to several other UCLA student films. Recently, he also contributed some original music for the Japanese American Museum. *Ethan Mao* is the third feature he has scored.

about the cast

Julian Nickson (Sarah)

Julia Nickson, born and raised in Singapore, has starred in a wide variety of roles in film and television. Her film credits include *China Cry*, for which she received resounding critical acclaim in the title role of Nora Lam, as well as *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Sidekicks*, and *K-2*. - Nickson also starred as the glamorous Orlando Ramos in *James Clavell's Noble House*, as Princess Aouda against Pierce Brosnan's Phileas Fogg in *Around the World in 80 Days* and in *Genghis Khan*, as Bortei, the Khan's first wife. Her extensive television credits include several M.O.W.'s, *The Girl Who Came Between Them*, *The Silver Fox*, *The Chinatown Murders*, *Dark Justice*, as well as recurring roles on *Babylon 5*, *Walker, Texas Ranger*, *The Fifth Corner*, *One West Waikiki*, and *The Young and the Restless*. Other television appearances include *The Division*, *Nash Bridges*, *JAG*, and *Chicago Hope*. Nickson's first independent film, *Life Tastes Good*, which premiered in Sundance was written and directed by Philip Kan Gotanda. She is also the mother of singer, songwriter China Soul.

Raymond Ma (Abraham)

Raymond Ma was born and raised in Hong Kong. With great determination, he started acting twenty-some years ago in Hawaii. His acting career has included countless appearances in TV shows such as *Hawaii Five-O*, *Hill Street Blue*, *L.A. Law*, *N.Y.P.D. Blue*, *Power Rangers*, *Love & Money*, *Action*, *Will & Grace*, *Alias* and *Dragnet*. He had also played recurring roles in *The Center*, *One West Waikiki*, *Crossroad Cafe*, *On Common Ground*, *Dhama & Greg*, and *Payne*. For his feature film credits, Ma has appeared in more than 20 films such as *Karate Kid 2*, *Hanoi Hilton*, *White Ghost*, *Midnightman*, *City of Industry*, *Lethal Weapon 4*, *Stuart Little 2*, *The Animal*, *Old School* and *Starsky & Hutch*. A true veteran, Ma was nonetheless excited to crack his knuckles to play Abraham, the juicy role of an emotionally challenged father, in *Ethan Mao*.

Jun Hee Lee (Ethan Mao)

Born and raised in St. Louis, MO, Jun Hee Lee attended Boston University as a Theatre and Management major, but decided to move to LA to pursue his life-long dream of acting after taking home the honors of "young adult male actor of the year, singing male, and dancing male" at the 2002 IMTA convention in LA. Having appeared in *American Pie IV: Band Camp* as a supporting lead, Lee started his career as the host of I-Channel's prime time TV show, *Asia Street*. He also hosted I-Channel's most watched music video show *Revolution*. *Ethan Mao* is Hee's first movie credit, in which he is honored to play the leading role of Ethan, and forever indebted to director Quentin Lee for the opportunity, not only for his first movie project, but also the opportunity of being a leading man, which he's always dreamed of. In his next film project, Jun Hee plays the supporting role of Mickey, in the feature film, *Entering Out*. Lee is also an accomplished performer, singing and dancing as a member of Warner Bros Team 11. He is also one of the lead voices in the upcoming video game release, *Nana*.

Jerry Hernandez (Remigio)

Born and raised in East Los Angeles, of Guatemalan and Filipino decent, Jerry Hernandez recently appeared in Jojo's recent hit video "Leave (Get Out)" and has starred in various theatrical productions in the Montebello, Whittier and Pico Rivera Communities such as: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *As you Like It* as well as Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians* before pursuing a professional acting career. Hernandez is also currently featured as a principal in the National Coca-Cola commercial *Inspiracion Latina (Latin Inspiration)* directed by Bryan Singer and has starred in the Independent Short *Little Black Boot* directed by Colete Burson. Aside from acting Hernandez is also a professional Print Model and Dancer and was featured as the cover story: *What Dancers are Dreaming* in the July edition of *DANCER* magazine. Working on *Ethan Mao* was a great opportunity for Jerry. The Dedication and passion on set of the cast and director Quentin Lee made for an incredible shoot and film.

Kevin Kleinberg (Josh)

Kevin Kleinberg is a native of Los Angeles. Only a few months after graduating from high school, Kleinberg found himself playing the role of "Trip" the Green Power Ranger on the successful T.V. series *Power Rangers—Time Force*. Since then he has appeared in T.V. commercials for A.D.I.D.A.S. and feature films such as *The List* and *The Cement Garden*. Kleinberg - is proud to play the role of Josh, in *Ethan Mao*. He had a great time working with, and being part of such a talented and passionate group of people.

David Tran (Noel)

Born and raised in Orange County, California, David Tran is currently a drama major in his senior year at O.C.H.S.A. high school. He began acting at the age of 12 after being inspired by the song *I Love You Always Forever* by Donna Lewis . His recent most well received credit was being part of a hugely talented ensemble *of The Laramie Project* at O.C.H.S.A. He also loves singing, dancing and musical theater.